FOSSIL FUELS ARE THE LIFEBLOOD OF AMERIKA, OF IMPERIALISM HERE & ALL OVER THE WORLD. HOW CAN WE EVER BRING THE IMPERIAL CORE TO ITS DEMISE IF WE DON'T HAVE A REAL MILITANT UNDERGROUND

DOOM TO THE PIPELINE

UNITY OF FIELDS INTERVIEW WITH A PROTESTOR FACING FELONIES FOR RESISTING THE MOUNTAIN VALLEY PIPELINE

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with whatever weapons at hand

Unity of Fields interviewed a comrade facing felony charges for protesting the Mountain Valley Pipeline (MVP), a 300-mile fossil fuel project blocked and delayed by court orders until the Biden administration pushed it through in mid-2023. In relation to alleged actions against the pipeline, over 100 activists have been arrested over the course of 6 and a half years across Virginia and West Virginia, with charges ranging from criminal trespass to felony joyriding and abduction. In addition to the criminal charges, the MVP also filed a civil suit against dozens of activists, accusing them of causing millions of dollars in damages and financial losses. On 25 February 2025, Branch and their codefendant will be facing trial for their misdemeanor charge and pre-trial for their felony charges. There will also be others in court that day facing trial in relation to other alleged MVP actions. The transcript has been lightly edited for clarity.

Unity of Fields: What's up comrade Branch? What is the struggle that you were engaged in for this particular action, allegedly? What are the pigs trying to charge you with?

Branch: Well, on October 16th, 2023, an action occurred against the Mountain Valley Pipeline (MVP) on Peter's Mountain. Dozens of actionists stopped work all day on the pipeline. I am being charged in relation to this action. They charged me with abduction and obstruction of a vehicle worth over a thousand dollars. Those are my two felonies, and I'm also being charged with conspiracy to injure the reputation of a business. That's my misdemeanor. And yes, that is a real charge in the state of Virginia.

UoF: Joke of a cracker state.

Branch: Plenty of people have asked me, so for reference, everyone, we did not kidnap anyone.

UoF: But they're trying to pin that on you.

Branch: Yeah, I mean, all these charges are bullshit. I didn't do any of the things they are accusing me of, they're just trying to pin all these charges on me and my codefendants.

UoF: Typical pig behavior. So you were detained in October?

Branch: Yeah so all this shit happened in October and then at the end of November 2023, retroactive warrants were issued against me for these made-up charges. It was active in Virginia and other surrounding states. UoF: How extensive was the warrant?

Branch: It was a few states, it was issued in Virginia and extraditable in a few others. I can't remember exactly which ones right now, but they were like, “We'll expand it to all 50 states if you don't come to turn yourself in during this time frame.” So I went and turned myself in December 2023. I had to go to Giles County, Virginia. For reference, on the day of the action, two people were arrested and they were not initially charged with kidnapping and they got bailed out. A few weeks later at their arraignment they were arrested again—which never happens—charged with kidnapping and were held for a few days before being released.

Branch: We have to step up our game and we have to step it up now. Even with all this repression, there has to be more because this is what the state has done and is always going to do. **We truly have to coalesce to bring the Al-Aqsa Flood here. You have to bring the Flood here. We have to destroy the United States of Amerika. And it can't be 20 years from now. It's going to have to be in the near future.**

One other thing I'm going to say, I think one of the most important things people have to remember, and this was told to me by my friend, is that we have to fight til the end of the line and pass that line. So even when you think your back is up against the wall, you have to fight even more. And I think, yes, while we're all afraid of repression or dying or any of that sort of stuff, I've been in situations like that before, but at the end of the day, why is my life more valuable than anyone else's? Than people in Palestine and people all over the world, people in the Congo and Haiti? Those people are dying too. If I go to jail, okay, my life's not worth more than them.

And we have to also understand that yes, in a revolution we may lose each other and we don't want to, but we lose so much more if we don't take that step. And I think at the end of the day, our own mortality is honestly the most powerful thing we can have. That's the one thing that we can be in control of. The state may try to kill us, but we can decide whether or not it's going to be on our terms. And if that sacrifice is going to make sure people in the future have a better life because the United States of Amerika will no longer be here, because like you said, there needs to be bodies on both sides, and there will be bodies on both sides. The revolution is going to happen. It's going to happen at some point.

UoF: Period.

ourselves and we also need to build up, like I said, prisoner support, armed community defense, self-defense and actual systems, and not scattered systems, of mutual aid. Real mutual aid systems that are centralized in communities. I see a lot of people shitting on mutual aid, and it's like, to be honest, yes, we need the action, but we also need mutual aid and we need it in a real centralized fashion because it's like if we don't have community and we don't have armed community, which will be one of the most important basics of building a revolution, we're not going to have one. We can run around, do whatever the fuck we want, but at the end of the day, if we don't have a popular cradle, we will never get anywhere. We will be snuffed out in two seconds. So it's like we truly have to take example of Palestine or other revolutions, and we have to take lead from them and actually build towards a real revolutionary movement here. Because right now I also see a lot of people including militants being like, "Oh, it's going to take years before we reach a revolution." Well, yes, but we don't really have that much time. **Revolution is not going to happen if we don't make it happen.** And right now we're running on a ticking clock with climate change. With people outside dying, people all over the world dying. The longer we take as we sit here in the comfort of the imperial core being like, "We can't do this. We can't do that." It's going to be more bodies. It's going to be more bodies every single day, every single second.

UoF: As George Jackson said, if there are going to be funerals, let there be funerals on both sides.

Branch: Right, and right now there's only bodies on one side here.

UoF: Yeah, and as the Red Army Faction said in the Urban Guerrilla Method, "By the time the conditions for armed struggle are right, it will be too late to prepare for it."

Branch: I think a lot of people don't understand we can create the conditions for armed struggle right now. We actually can craft a story if we want to. But people in the imperial core, including so-called militants... I'm sorry but to be real, even I can't really claim to be militant. I don't think any of us can rightfully claim to be militant in any sort of fashion.

UoF: Not really. We agree.

UoF: Can you speak about your experience being detained in jail? How long were you in there? What were the other people like? How did the pigs treat you?

Branch: So I turned myself in and then I had a magistrate hearing. They were actually about to give me bail, and the magistrate changed their mind, shredded my bail papers and was like, no bail. And then I basically had to be taken to jail and I ended up having a hearing the next morning where they granted me bail at $25,000. The prosecutor was actually pushing for no bail. He was like, "Don't give her bail, don't let her leave the state." All this shit. The judge ended up giving me bail and I was bonded out later that day. I don't remember the exact time, but I only really spent a day, maybe little over a day, in jail. So I got bonded out, which means 10% of the bail was paid.

When I was in there, they kept us in the holding cell for a few hours initally and I could hear from the other side. They had a two-way mirror that you can't see through but the pigs could see you. Some of it wasn't too well patched, so I could still see through the corner and I was quiet for a sec to hear 'em. And they were basically like, "Listen to whatever she says, she's a pipeline protestor." So most of the time, I just shut the fuck up. I knew they were listening. They took us to the county jail there, the River County Jail. It's essentially the equivalent of Rikers in New York. I was in solitary confinement there for a few hours, and also, when they took us up there, they fucking shoved me in the back of this fucking van. That was a rough ass ride up there, up a fucking mountain. I was shackled and I had to make sure I didn't slide and fucking hit my head on the metal cage in there.

UoF: Yeah, rough riding like Freddie Gray shit, pigs kill people that way. Okay, so how did you hear about the MVP, why did you want to be involved and what did you think about the movement when you were there? We're curious about the racial composition and class composition and political ideology guiding the movement, if there was one.

Branch: I've been involved with other stuff before MVP and I knew of the MVP struggle. I had friends who live in Virginia and West Virginia, so I knew the MVP is just a carbon bomb. We don't have that much time left to stop climate change. And not just that, the pipeline also has contracts with weapons manufacturers and basically they power certain—hold up—

lemme just pull up the name. They power different weapons facilities, including ones that are under contract with BAE Systems, which is a zionist weapons manufacturer that produces white phosphorus. And the MVP struggle has been going on for years. The pipeline has leaked and it goes over so many waterways and runs the risk of posioning so many people. So it's affecting the people that live there. I knew people down there and all this stuff and I was like, “Yeah, I'm going to go down there and try to help out any way I can.”

UoF: The general vicinity around the pipeline is populated by a lot of poor people, I'm assuming.

Branch: Yeah, I mean, most of Appalachia is poor. Most of the neighborhoods the pipeline goes through are just poor, rural neighborhoods. It's all just making Appalachia a sacrifice zone for pipelines so they can extract and poison people there and kill people in Palestine. MVP is a fracked gas pipeline. And of course, **gas and oil are the gears of imperialism. Fossil fuels are the lifeblood of Amerika,** of imperialism here and all over the world. So of course they're going to want it and the imperial core doesn't care who they hurt. That's just how it goes.

As far as race and class go, there was definitely a lot of white people there because a lot of Appalachia is white. There were also people of color, but it was majority white and most of the people there were poor people.

UoF: I believe it was the Battle of Blair Mountain that was one of the largest armed uprisings since the Civil War. It was in Logan County, West Virginia, and I'm pretty sure it was the largest number of Amerikan pigs that were killed in one battle in the history of this country. They were striking coal miners and they actually marched to the local jail and broke out all of the workers who had been imprisoned for violating the martial law orders that were put in place.

Branch: Appalachia has a long history of militant struggle. I think people look down on it and they'll be like, “Oh, these places are just poor.” **But militant struggle comes from lived experience, of course. It doesn't come from anything else. It comes when you are feeling that boot on top of you.**

UoF: Yeah, Appalachia is such an interesting case. Obviously we know that the average Cracker Amerikan is a reactionary little eichmann, but that's

And also to tie back to the MVP, I am sure you all saw the hurricanes that happened and all the flooding. It destroyed Appalachia and the county I got arrested in, Gilles County and the neighboring counties. River County Jail. All that area was flooded and no data was released, but some of the women that I was in jail with might've died if they were still in there because of all the flooding. Everything was flooded. I remember just picking up my phone and looking at the photos and I could see the entire jail, the area I was in, all flooded.

So people have to understand that we really actually have to support people in prisons. We need to have an organized support for prisoners that have taken political action and also support people in general. We need abolition for all, and that's not going to happen without a revolution. And honestly, all prisoners are political prisoners.

UoF: Any last words?

Branch: So in October of 2023, we saw the Al-Aqsa Flood happen and it surged more militancy from people and all this action, but at the end of the day, we still haven't seen much progress. And it's just like how I said earlier, how can we truly claim to be in solidarity with people without taking real action? And I think people have to understand, we all post about Hamas, we post about stuff, we're in support, but at the end of the day, Amerika is still bombing them with the bombs that are coming from us. And it's very hypocritical, even of me to be like, oh yeah, I support Hamas when in reality we haven't taken much action truly in support of them. And I was saying earlier, we need to build all this infrastructure. We need to rebuild so much to get to revolution. We need to rebuild prisoner support. We need to rebuild community defense in poor neighborhoods. We need to rebuild armed community defense. We need to invest in our communities. So it's not simply taking action, but it's also building up that base because in you see in places like Palestine—Hamas—they're able to go and hide within their communities.

UoF: The popular cradle!

Branch: Yeah. We don't have much of a popular cradle here, and we have to go about building it. So not only do we need to take militant action, we need to do different types of militant action, which you all can guess, but I won't be listing them here for obvious reasons. But we also need to arm

their own separate political prisoner support network, siloed off and disconnected from the movement. It's the same problem of fragmentation as with underground or clandestine militancy.

Branch: We lost a lot to COINTELPRO. We have to build back up. In terms of prisons and abolition in general, yes, we should support political prisoners, but we should also support people in prison as a whole. We have to actually carry out abolition, for everyone, not just the people we know or the people directly involved in struggle. There's people inside who are genuinely suffering, who don't have support. Honestly, if I go to prison, to be for real, I'll have support, I'll be fine. I know my commissary will be filled by my friends every day. If anything happens to me, everyone's going to create a fuss about it, the other people in these prisons, they'll die quietly. No one is there to help them.

When I went in jail that day, there were other women in the cell next to me, and one of them was crying. This was right before the holidays, and she was like, “I'm not going to be with my kids for the holidays.” She was really crying. Who's going to help her or another person? When I got released on bond, someone else got released with me. She got her clothes back and she was like, “Oh my God, they're still intact.” The clothes that she was arrested in, because she was in this jail for seven months, she's not been convicted of anything. She was in there for seven months and she was in another jail before that for another seven months. So she's been locked up for a total of 14 months until that day that we got released. She hasn't been convicted of anything, she's just been rotting in different jails for the past 14 months. Her clothes were still dirty when they gave it to her with the mud that she was arrested with that day.

In the jail there, they literally had a drawing making fun of the prisoners. They had it in the manual, they had to use the manual because the fuck ass idiot pig didn't know how to fucking fingerprint me. She had asked someone else to come. She was like, “I haven't released a prisoner since October, so someone needs to remind me how to do this process again.” They hadn't fucking released anyone since fuck ass October! And then we literally got released and she was trying to say Merry Christmas to me! A pig! And I was like, “Fuck you, bitch.” I just kept saying that over and over again as we walked out of the jail, like, “Fuck you fuck you fuck you.” Anyway, people have to understand that we need support in jails.

not totally the case in Appalachia. And the people I've talked to who have worked on MVP stuff, most of them white working class people, they are super militant about anti-racism, specifically. It's honestly so fucking cool. The people reading this, I hope they take note of this. **Hard crackers do exist! Like the Irish, the IRA especially, I'd kiss the ground Brendan Hughes walked on, Marilyn Buck and Laura Whitehorn and David Gilbert and the militant anti-racist Appalachians—but hard crackers need to be throwing down and serving the struggle to end Babylon.**

Branch: Exactly. If you're a hard cracker: fucking do some militant shit. That's my message. If you get anything out of this interview: HARD CRACKERS GO DO SOME SHIT! Fuck some shit up!

UoF: We love it.

Branch: Avoid getting caught though.

UoF: Crucial piece! We love this so much. Your energy is such a beautiful energy to bring to the struggle.

I don't know how much you know about this, but I am curious, how do the local people that are not activists feel about all of the MVP militancy? Do you think most of them are on board or are there tensions between them and the activists?

Branch: A lot of people have supported the fight against MVP because the pipeline is affecting their communites. It's going over waterways where it can leak. The pipeline also runs the risk of bursting and if it does, so many poor communites will be in the blast radius of it. MVP has tried to take people's land to use for the pipeline. A lot of people don't like that, which is understandable. How are you going to come and poison my land, my water, my air, and turn us into a sacrifice zone?

UoF: I remember another comrade who was involved in the MVP struggle mentioning an older reactionary white man who resented the protestors until the pipeline poisoned the stream in his own backyard, and then he started going to the camp and organizing with yall. So you feel, and this is generally the sense we have gotten, that there's a lot of popular support?

Branch: There is, which is really fucking cool.

So the pipeline was completed and became “functional” last summer, but just six days before they started operating it, one of the jumper pipes burst during routine maintenance. It essentially just burst because the pipeline has been rotting for years, exposed to the sun and elements. Engineers have said this pipeline has a lot of flaws and is at very high risk of just blowing up on its own and potentially making a massive spill and poisoning everyone in the area.

UoF: Could you speak a little bit more to your experience of facing repression over the past year and a half? How do you contextualize the charges you're facing in the national wave of repression against anti-zionist protestors, against Stop Cop City protestors?

Branch: I mean in terms of the repression, they're definitely trying to get me and my codefendants on these charges, and if convicted, it could mean decades behind bars. The abduction charge can carry 20 plus years, so they're definitely trying to scare people away from doing shit, just as we've seen over and over again. And not only am I being charged with this bogus stuff, I'm also being sued along with over 40 people who have taken action against MVP who have also, at one point or another, been placed on this SLAPP civil suit.

I mean, maybe I'm a bit of a fucking arrogant idiot, but I honestly haven't really been thinking about [the case] much, which is a little bit of a crazy thing to say. And yeah, this is a part of a national wave of repression. We see the RICO charges in the Cop City movement, and how the state has come down on people protesting the genocide in Palestine. **The tactics they used to come after people who have taken action against Cop City, we see the state exporting those tactics to use on us fighting the MVP, and we see them export these tactics such as retroactive warrants to come down on Palestine protesters.** We have seen the proliferation of cop cites being built all across this settler colony.

But yes, it sucks. It's definitely repression and it definitely limits what I am able to do. I have to be careful now with my organizing, I can't get arrested because of course if I get arrested, that means being shipped back there to jail until trial. And obviously that would not look good because under Virginian law, let's just say they don't like it when you do certain things...

getting much public support. Yes, they have their committee, but it's not like everyone's talking about Casey. Even the people who were facing charges for going to the Brooklyn Museum executives' houses. Not many people have been talking about them. Even for Cop City, it's sort of going back into the periphery where people aren't talking much about the people who are currently facing repression for Cop City, and that's an issue. We also don't have any organized prisoner support or it's not even at the forefront of people's minds.

UoF: There is a real problem with the way that prisoner support is being organized right now. It's all about separate campaigns for individual prisoners, it moves us away from the idea that prisoners constitute a cohesive political, social group and that we must engage in solidarity and struggle on those grounds. Political prisoners in particular, people who are in prison because of their political work, constitute an essential part of our movement, and I agree that we have basically abandoned them and the idea that they are the vanguard of revolution in this country.

Branch: There has been a large abandonment of people who are currently facing charges or people who are currently in prison. Casey Goonan is one of the people who is in jail from the wave of last spring's student uprisings. Yet most people don't know about them. That's not a good thing. And we see in places like Palestine, there is a very vibrant community to help prisoners.

UoF: That's the whole heart of it.

Branch: Yeah, it's the flood. **In the Al-Aqsa Flood, they call prisoners their North Star. And if we are going to build up towards a revolution, our prisoners have to be our North Star too.**

UoF: That's exactly right. And I think part of understanding that prisoners constitute their own social group means that we have to fight for them as a group. Now it's like, fight for this one prisoner or this other prisoner. Help this or that isolated campaign. Where I'm hearing this critique from the most is from our elders that came out of the sixties movement. They say, “look, when our people were locked up, we had organizations that helped every single person that was locked up for political reasons and the comrades who were locked up were able to continue organizing inside.” It wasn't pick and choose and let them rot. Now it's like each person has

even now in the movement, there is no militant aboveground in terms of propaganda and support for actions. Yes, an aboveground has to be limited. You can't do certain actions, but there's also no militant political line. **Most of the aboveground left in this country is very adjacent to NGOs, which take energy and feed it back into upholding this racist settler colony we live in.** It's very a bad state where we are at now. While yes, a lot of people in the movement will say, “Oh we have leftist politics, we are communists or anarchists,” in reality, despite what most label themselves, most of them are just more liberals. At the end of the day, most of their actions and what they say are like, “oh, we are anti-war,” and it's like, no, we should be pro-people's war! That's what we have to be. **We are not anti-war. We have to be pro-people's war because we as people who live in Amerika in the imperial core, every day we go on is the day that more people die both here and around the world because it revolves around blood.** We cannot simply have a march where we shout at empty buildings or take isolated actions and pat ourselves on the back. Even the MVP actions that have occured over the years have caused delays, and delayed the completion by a long time, but people have to do more. We have to organize and get to a point of militancy where we can actually threaten the United States because we have to build towards a revolution. And right now, we are not even at step one of building a revolution.

UoF: We're still trying to get people to admit that the United States is the enemy, and that's not a good thing. Slowly but surely people are getting it though.

Branch: More people are definitely starting to get it but there are still a lot who don't. Even stuff around Palestine, there will be people who openly support Hamas, but they're still slightly liberal in the sense that they don't want to take escalated action or they don't even support escalated action. It's one thing to not be able to take it yourself. Some people genuinely have circumstances preventing them from doing that. And maybe they're just genuinely really scared.

There are people who definitely have valid stuff to say, but some of these people will not even support people who take action and are going through repression. They will not publish a statement of support, even a post on social media. There is actually very, very little support for militants outside of their own little militant group. We don't really have much prisoner support for people like Casey Goonan who hasn't been

UoF: One of the most repressive cracker states out there.

Branch: But definitely it has affected me in terms of limiting what I do and I have to be more careful because I could be sent to jail or if I do something, you never know what surveillance they could have on you. So I just have to be more careful in that sense. And honestly, **the process is the punishment.** They want to drag it out as long as possible to basically try to keep people from doing more things to keep us tied up with this legal stuff. We see this tactic over and over again. They press these BS charges to scare people, to intimidate people and basically to make sure that you're fighting this case, so you can't really do much else besides that. It has definitely made it harder to find work or get an apartment. But besides that, I've continued to organize, just not doing anything illegal.

I'm not going to stop organizing. I'm not going to stop because people are still dying in Palestine. People are still dying here. How could I stop when all this shit's happening? I'm just like, fuck it. If they want to do this shit, they're going to do this shit because that's what the state does, but no matter what, I won't stop. If they want to come for me, let them come.

UoF: Is the repression breeding more resistance? What does the future look like for militant struggle?

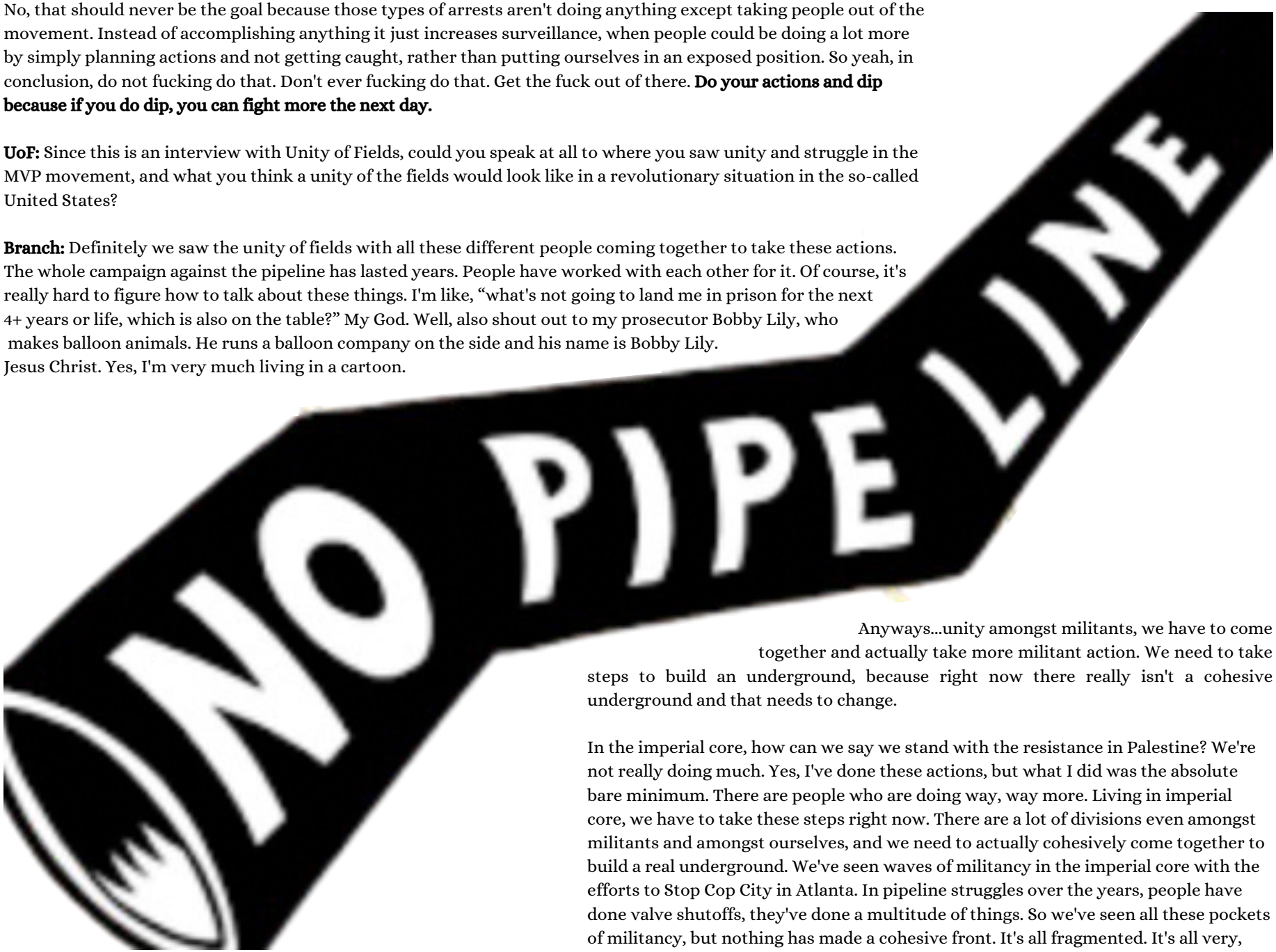
Branch: I mean, I've always believed in militancy and yeah, this has made me more militant honestly. I'm just like, you know what? This repression is going to happen but we're going to have to keep doing this. But also it made me realize that yes, while the action I took that day was good, and I do not regret taking it, I regret doing it in the way I did because it ended up in people getting arrested. **Of course the state is always going to come down on us if they find us, but we shouldn't give them the chance.** The tactics of locking down and your standard civil disobedence tactics are not always the best thing, and looking, in hindsight, I wish that maybe we had done something else. We definitely have to build an underground. There's only going to be more repression, and it's also like, how can we ever defeat Amerikkka? **How can we ever bring the imperial core to its demise if we don't have a real militant underground?**

I really don't think anyone should ever do your standard civil disobedience tactics where you stay there even if the pigs show up, essentially at that point of putting yourself in the postion to be arrested.

No, that should never be the goal because those types of arrests aren't doing anything except taking people out of the movement. Instead of accomplishing anything it just increases surveillance, when people could be doing a lot more by simply planning actions and not getting caught, rather than putting ourselves in an exposed position. So yeah, in conclusion, do not fucking do that. Don't ever fucking do that. Get the fuck out of there. **Do your actions and dip because if you do dip, you can fight more the next day.**

UoF: Since this is an interview with Unity of Fields, could you speak at all to where you saw unity and struggle in the MVP movement, and what you think a unity of the fields would look like in a revolutionary situation in the so-called United States?

Branch: Definitely we saw the unity of fields with all these different people coming together to take these actions. The whole campaign against the pipeline has lasted years. People have worked with each other for it. Of course, it's really hard to figure how to talk about these things. I'm like, "what's not going to land me in prison for the next 4+ years or life, which is also on the table?" My God. Well, also shout out to my prosecutor Bobby Lily, who makes balloon animals. He runs a balloon company on the side and his name is Bobby Lily.
Jesus Christ. Yes, I'm very much living in a cartoon.



Anyways...unity amongst militants, we have to come together and actually take more militant action. We need to take steps to build an underground, because right now there really isn't a cohesive underground and that needs to change.

In the imperial core, how can we say we stand with the resistance in Palestine? We're not really doing much. Yes, I've done these actions, but what I did was the absolute bare minimum. There are people who are doing way, way more. Living in imperial core, we have to take these steps right now. There are a lot of divisions even amongst militants and amongst ourselves, and we need to actually cohesively come together to build a real underground. We've seen waves of militancy in the imperial core with the efforts to Stop Cop City in Atlanta. In pipeline struggles over the years, people have done valve shutoffs, they've done a multitude of things. So we've seen all these pockets of militancy, but nothing has made a cohesive front. It's all fragmented. It's all very, very fragmented. And